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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001757

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STATE FOR AF/W
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: CONTINUED INFIGHTING PLAGUES OPPOSITION PARTY

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reason 1.4 (D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Summary: In a late October twist in its ongoing leadership struggle, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) expelled faction leader Senator Mojisoluwa Akinfenwa for anti-party activities. Akinfenwa responded with his own allegations that leadership rival Chief Bisi Akande had authored the expulsion, and that his removal was the subplot of a larger caper engineered by Lagos State Governor Tinubu to hijack the AD to his own ends in 2007. The AD has been in tumult since its setbacks in the 2003 election. The antagonists in this struggle have taken their competing claims to court in hopes of winning by legal edict what they could not resolve by political means. End summary.

FACTION LEADER'S EXPULSION ELICITS COUNTER-CHARGES

2. (U) The AD, the Yoruba-based opposition party, suffered another eruption in its ongoing leadership crisis with the expulsion of faction leader Akinfenwa. AD vice chairman for the south-west, Alhaji Olatunji Hamzat, stated the Senator was expelled for "anti-party activities." This term has quickly become a euphemism employed by the leadership of a party to get rid of internal opposition, particularly one's leadership rivals. In that such rivalries in Nigeria's parties are more common than a cold, this term is quickly becoming hackneyed and meaningless. For his part, Akinfenwa responded with hyperbole, dismissing the allegations as "an exercise in futility and the hugest joke of the century," and condemned the action as a violation of due process.

3. (C) Akinfenwa's rebuttal continued with charges that the current AD leadership crisis has been orchestrated by Lagos State Governor Tinubu. Akinfenwa alleged that Tinubu had ignited the infighting as part of a plan to hijack the AD and steer it toward helping to form a new party in support of Vice President Atiku's 2007 presidential aspirations. (Comment: Although made bitter by his sour grapes position of being on the losing side of this leadership tiff, Akinfenwa's observation is not devoid of credence. For months, Tinubu has been huddling with different groups of political associates bruited the idea of forming a new party with Atiku. On November 9, a group of pro-Atiku PDP outcasts, including former PDP national chairman Audu Ogbeh, met to discuss just that - establishing a new party: the Movement for the Defence of Democracy (MDD). End Comment.)

BACKGROUND

4. (C) Harkening to the political legacy of Yoruba political icon Obafemi Awolowo, AD showed itself be the mainstream southwest party during the 1999 elections by winning virtually all the elective positions in Ondo, Lagos, Ekiti, Ogun, Oyo and Osun states. AD fortunes nosedived in 2003 when it lost all but one of the states it controlled, with only Tinubu retaining the Lagos State governorship. The internecine fingerpointing began once the reality of the debacle had registered. The internal dispute has not let up, eventually leading to two separate national conventions held simultaneously on December 16, 2003 in Lagos and Abuja. The Abuja convention elected Senator Mojisola Akinfenwa as its national chairman while the Lagos gathering selected former Osun State Governor Bisi Akande.

5. (U) The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) directed the party to conduct another national convention in order to recognize one of the two factions as head, or find another amicable solution. Another national convention, attended by a majority of the AD's leaders, was held in Lagos on September 26, 2004. INEC officials observed the event, tagged the Unity Convention, but the Akinfenwa faction boycotted it. They protested Tinubu had unfairly stacked the

roster of attendees with his yes men, thus making the decision taken at the convention a foregone conclusion unrepresentative of the true rank and file of the party. Akande was elected as the new chairman. Following the convention, INEC formally recognized Akande's chairmanship. Of course, the saga did not end there.

16. (C) A dissatisfied Akinfenwa took the new AD executive committee and INEC to court challenging the legality of the 2004 Unity Convention. In an interim decree, the court held that the two factions should maintain the status quo until a final ruling is made. Following the court's directive, INEC withdrew the earlier recognition given to the Akande group and said it would not recognize any of the factions pending the final adjudication of the case. (Comment: These AD insiders may not be the only ones dabbling with the script. President Obasanjo, who considers himself the senior Yoruba political figure, sees Governor Tinubu as a potential usurper of this role. He thus wants to trip Tinubu at every available opportunity. President Obasanjo evidently wrote INEC criticizing the prior decision to recognize the Akande faction as the national leadership. To keep Tinubu from taking the political offensive in the southwest, Obasanjo, at the very least, would like to enervate the AD by keeping it roiled in a leadership squabble. End comment.)

17. (C) INEC's backtrack was met by accusations from the AD-affiliated Afenifere, the most influential Yoruba socio-political group, that INEC was the agent of a scheme prepared by the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) to weaken the AD. Yinka Odumakin, Afenifere's Publicity Secretary, told PolSpec the PDP wants to destroy AD so PDP

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could retain the southwestern states it "dubiously hijacked" in 2003. However, a PDP spokesperson told journalists in Abuja the PDP had no hand in AD's predicament, advised the AD to look inward for solutions and stop blaming others for its problems.

18. (U) Afenifere is very concerned about the AD's prospects if the party rift is not mended. Chief Olasupo Shonibare, deputy AD leader in Lagos but more an ally of Akinfenwa, said the factions must come together to challenge the PDP, and calls upon the faction led by Akande and Tinubu for suggestions of how to resolve the impasse. Afenifere is determined to have a forum to promote Yoruba political interests. If the AD split is not repaired soon Afenifere may likely try to fashion another party.

COMMENT

19. (C) The confusion and turbulence that engulf the AD leadership is part and parcel of Nigerian politics, and Yoruba politics has always been among the fractious. Given the PDP's near stranglehold on the southwest, the throes and tics exhibited by the AD may well be the signs of a once healthy political organism now nearing the frontiers of its extinction. In part, this is a result of self-destructive infighting; but the AD would not have gotten into such woeful shape without getting a little timely help from its enemies. Most likely, the infighting will continue, unity will remain elusive and the AD will stagger into 2006 and perhaps into 2007 a divided if not soon-to-be broken house. The prospect for the AD to recapture the Southwest come 2007 is dim and may be getting dimmer. End comment.
BROWNE